Blow my whistle & eat my poison

A pedagogical study of ideologies and language in music lyrics

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Abstract

**Title:** Blow my whistle & eat my poison— a pedagogical study of ideologies and language in music lyrics  
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**Abstract:** The aim of this study is to investigate how students perceive English authentic material, ideologically and linguistically, outside of school and whether it is possible to find clear connections to what is or is not taught as part of the English subject in school. This study is based on investigating how pupils perceive music lyrics, as a vast majority of them listen to music on an everyday basis. Three lyrics were chosen as material for a qualitative interview with four pupils. The semi-structured interview was inspired by the methods of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The results of the interview are compared with the values in the curriculum for the Swedish compulsory school (Lgr11) and the syllabus for the English language. The results show that students have a superficial knowledge of what it means to know a word and that their interpretation of the meaning follows the same pattern when it comes to underlying ideologies. As a superficial knowledge of vocabulary and values may affect pupils negatively, I believe language education should aim to unravel actual and possible meanings of a text. With this study I propose using a ‘tool’ called CDA, when working with authentic material in order to enhance pupils’ understanding of the English language.

**Keywords:** Authentic material, CDA, Gender, Prejudice, Music, Lyrics, Ideology, Language, Lgr11, Curriculum, Syllabus, Interdisciplinary
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1. Introduction

One of the reasons why school attendance in Sweden has been obligatory for a fairly long time is that it is considered to be the fundamental preparation for whatever is to come – it aims to prepare us for life. In the Swedish Curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and the leisure-time centre2011 (Lgr11) this is clearly stated: “The school has the task of imparting fundamental values and promoting pupils’ learning in order to prepare them to live and work in society” (p. 11). Since life involves more than what happens within the walls of school, it has for many teachers become important to use authentic material in education, and thus interweaving the private and the scholastic worlds. Authentic material is one way of providing that link.

In language learning, in particular, authentic material is often used in order to provide representative examples for how languages are actually used in real life. In the syllabus for the English language we can, for instance, read the following: “In order to deal with spoken language and texts, pupils should be given the opportunity to develop their skills in relating content to their own experiences, living conditions and interests” (p. 32). In order to obtain this aim, using material that has an authentic value for the pupils is fundamental.

Much research within language learning shows positive effects from using authentic material. Collie & Slater (2008) argue for the use of literary texts in the classroom since the authenticity of them has many positive outcomes. For example, they mention that the written material ‘out there’ is extremely varied thus offering us various examples of authentic language, which is in contrast to the somewhat distorted and non-genuine language that can be created in the classroom context. They also bring up positive outcomes like cultural- and language enrichment and personal involvement. For instance, far from all pupils have had or will ever have the opportunity of visiting a country where the mother tongue is the language being studied. For those pupils authentic material should be especially important in order to project the cultural aspects of that language in the education (p. 3ff).

Tricia Hedge also argues in favor of the use of authentic material in education, but acknowledges at the same time the downsides of using authentic material. In Teaching and
Learning in the English Classroom (2008) she takes us through three problems concerning grammar and pragmatics in spoken discourse: firstly, she mentions the complex relationship between the idealized grammar rules taught in school and the somewhat grammarless spoken discourse found outside of school. Secondly, spoken discourse does not keep to conventional meanings, i.e. it can for instance be ironic, sarcastic and provocative and still be written in the same way as if it would be a simple statement. Finally, Hedge discusses the ways we interpret meaning of what is said or written and concludes that the context is extremely important and that grammatical items in learning materials should be contextualized (p. 156f).

I believe it is important to not separate the different linguistic inputs pupils receive on a daily basis from one another, as they are all of great importance in language acquisition. The question is rather how we can provide pupils with the right tools in order for them to interpret valid meanings and be aware of how different types of language styles are linked to certain kinds of contexts and relate the language studied in authentic materials to values communicated in steering documents.

1.1. Aim

My aim with the present study is to investigate how pupils perceive English authentic material, both ideologically and linguistically, outside of school and whether it is possible to find clear connections to what is or is not taught as part of the English subject in school. My chosen authentic material for this study is music lyrics. Ideologically, I wish to see if what pupils learn from music lyrics in their spare time coincides with their overall attitudes towards other people and whether these go in the same direction as the values stated in Lgr11. Linguistically, it is of interest to investigate whether there is an awareness of certain styles of language (both grammar and lexis) that go with certain types of contexts and of the importance of using an appropriate style of English depending on the context as misuse of very informal language could lead to coming across as being offensive. Thus, the research questions in this essay are:
- What kind of music do pupils listen to in their spare time?
- What kind of influence could music lyrics have on them?
- Do the ideologies and language represented in today’s music go in the same direction as the values stated in the Swedish curriculum (Lgr11) and the aims for language proficiency in the syllabus for the English language?
- How can English teachers work with authentic material in order to stay as true as possible to the curriculum (Lgr11) and the syllabus?

1.2. Structure

In chapter 2 I will present the material and method of this study, which is based on an analytical tool called CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis). Chapter 3 contains a description of this tool, primarily focusing on gender and prejudice, which is meant to provide the readers with an understanding of the theoretical aspect and the foundation for the conducted study. In chapter 4 the results of the study are presented and analyzed, and thereafter further discussed in chapter 5. This study ends with a conclusive chapter, chapter 6, where final thoughts about the results are expressed.
2. Material and Method

I have chosen to use music lyrics in order to pursue my aim for this essay, as music is something a vast majority of, if not all, pupils are exposed to on a daily basis. In Section 2.1 I will describe the selection of the lyrics, in 2.2 I will include a few words about the lyrics and the artists, in 2.3 I will comment on the production of the interview form and finally in 2.4 I will discuss reliability, validity and generalizability in terms of how my method corresponds to the purpose of the study.

2.1. Selection of lyrics to include in study

The selection of music lyrics for this analysis is the result of an opinion poll in the form of a survey. The survey was randomly distributed among 40 pupils of the ages 12 to 19 at a suburban high school and an upper secondary school in Gothenburg. The pupils were asked to answer the questions “What artists (who sing in English) do you listen to?” and “What specific songs are your favorites?”. The results of the survey were compiled and compared with current music charts, such as the billboard list and various Swedish radio channel charts, in order to select lyrics which would be representative for the music pupils generally listen to outside of school at the current time of conducting this study.

The artists whose music lyrics I used for my interviews with pupils are Flo Rida, Rihanna and the Swedish House Mafia. These artists were frequently mentioned by both sexes in the survey answers and they are current on the music charts in Sweden and in many other countries. Instead of choosing the most recent hits by these artists, I decided to work with rather recent, but mainly the most well-known songs, for the purpose of making sure the pupils I interviewed are familiar with the songs. Thus, I have chosen Whistle by Flo Rida, Cockiness by Rihanna and Miami 2 Ibiza by the Swedish House Mafia.

2.2. Music lyrics and artists

Tramar Dillard, more commonly known as Flo Rida, is a 32-year-old American singer/rapper who became word-known after his big hit song Low, featuring T-pain, in 2009. Since then he has had a number of hit songs topping the music charts, such as Right Round, Club Can’t
Handle Me and Wild Ones. The song I will use for this study, Whistle, is a pop song from the album Wild Ones and was released on April 24, 2012. This song ranked number one on music charts world-wide, Sweden included. It was written by Flo Rida, David Glass, Marcus Killian, Justin Franks, Breyan Isaac and Antonio Mobley, and produced by DJ Frank E and Glass. The song has received mixed reviews as its lyrics are sexually suggestive but many critics argue that its success is the result of it being a well-produced song and containing a “catchy” hook (www.wikipedia.com).

Rihanna, or Robyn Rihanna Fenty, is a 24-year-old singer and actress from Barbados. She has, however, been living in the U.S since 2004 when she moved there to pursue her career. Like Flo Rida, she has as a solo artist had numerous hit songs over the years, but she has also been successful when featuring other artists like Jay Z, Eminem and David Guetta. Some of her most famous hit songs are Umbrella, Only girl in the world and We found love. The song of study, Cockiness – also known as Cockiness (Love it), is from the album Talk that Talk, released in 2011, and was written by Rihanna, Candice Pillay, D. Abernathy and Shondrae Crawford, and produced by Mr. Bangladesh. The song, which is a dubstep and dancehall track conveying the singer’s desire for sex, has – just like Whistle – been criticized for its sexual lyrical content. The song was never on the Billboard hot 100 chart, and entered at best number 26 and 33 on R&B charts in the U.S and the U.K. This is the one song out of the three chosen for this study, which has never had top positions on charts (www.wikipedia.com). The reason for choosing this song, out of all well-known songs by Rihanna, was that I found the song to be different from the music she is somewhat associated with and also because the lyrics are very sexual and explicit. I wanted to see what reactions would show as a result of using a less well-known and different song to what most people are used to hearing from such a well-established artist.

Swedish House Mafia consists of the three house DJs and producers from Sweden: Axwell (34 years old), Steven Angello (30 years old) and Sebastian Ingrosso (29 years old). They have been active as Swedish House Mafia since 2008 and in June 2012 they announced that their 2012/1013-tour would be their last one as a group. They have produced hit tracks like Leave the word behind, One (Your name) and the song of study Miami 2 Ibiza, which is on the album Until One and was released on October 4, 2010, in the U.K. Featuring on this track is the English rapper Tinie Tempah (born in 1988) who does all vocals in the song. The song
was written and produced by Patrick Okogwu (Tinie Tempah), Steve Angello, Axel Hedfors (Axwell) and Sebastian Ingrosso. In Sweden the song peaked at number 10 on the music chart “Sverigetopplistan”, whereas in the U.S and the U.K it had the number one position on several charts (www.wikipedia.com).

2.3. The interview: questions and execution

As Hedge states (see Introduction), context is important for interpreting meaning. For this reason, in the making of the interview questions, I used an analytical tool called CDA, Critical Discourse Analysis, as it includes analysis of context in general but also touches upon matters such as gender and prejudice which are both frequently mentioned in Lgr11 as well as they are common issues in most types of media discourse. I will thus in Chapter 3 provide a description of CDA, primarily focusing on gender and prejudice, as I want to provide the readers with the same pre-knowledge I had when using this analytical tool - in the sense of keeping it in mind while producing relevant questions - for the interview. That being said, I however, wanted to keep the questions as open as possible in order to minimize any type of subjective influence on the pupils’ answers.

The questioning sheet consisted of three parts: one part that has to do with ideology and message, a second part which deals with linguistics and a third, more general, part about music in language learning. The first two parts (questions 1-7), about ideology and language, were to be answered after each song was played. I played the pupils three songs (in the following order): Whistle by Flo Rida, Cockiness by Rihanna and Miami 2 Ibiza by the Swedish House Mafia (all lyrics are attached as appendices). The pupils answered the third part (questions 8-10) at the end of the interview, as this part is not specifically attached to any of the songs. The interview was, however, semi-structured in the sense that, as it progressed, questions were added and adapted depending on what the pupils answered. The interview form is included as an appendix.

Finding respondents for the interview was not as easy as I thought it would be. I soon realized that it would be difficult to find random pupils that would willingly agree to being interviewed in their spare time. Eventually, through a friend, I came in contact with a teacher who was willing to “lend” me four of her economy studying students during their
Swedish lesson. Two girls and two boys volunteered to be interviewed in a group and I informed them that the interview would be completely anonymous. They all agreed to being recorded in order to facilitate my transcription of the interview. Interviewing four people from the same class and conducting a group interview were both decisions made due to practical reasons and various limitations. However, being aware of how the pupils’ answers could be affected by one another, I made sure that they would at least take notes in private while listening to the song. This way I could compare if what they said out loud corresponded to what they earlier expressed in writing. The interview lasted for about 40 minutes.

2.4. Reliability, validity and generalizability

In terms of whether my choice of method is relevant to the purpose of this study, I have to argue that, in my opinion, it is relevant as perception is subjective and by distributing surveys and interviewing people, you come to know their subjective opinions. Having said that, the results may naturally differ depending on whose subjective opinions you come across in your study – hence, this study may not be reliable in the sense that, if conducted the exact same way, it would probably not render identical results. Concerning validity, in terms of whether my method actually measures what I intended it to measure, I believe my study is valid. My intent with this study was to see how pupils perceive music – ideologically and linguistically - outside of school, and by interviewing four students I came to know how they perceive the chosen songs for this study. However, after executing this study I do not know how all pupils perceive all songs. A study of that kind is not possible to conduct. The choice of “study objects” is both subjective and limited, thus making this study, as a whole reliable and valid with regard to the informants interviewed and the songs included. The results show tendencies that should be generalizable to other songs on the similar topics and could be representative of a larger student group.
3. CDA

The theoretical background of the present essay is focused on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and to some extent also authentic material, as the two are more or less entangled with each other. These are relevant to the aim of this essay, i.e. investigating how pupils perceive music - ideologically and linguistically - outside of school. In the syllabus for the English language, the importance of using authentic material in education is clearly stated. In addition, the curriculum for the Swedish compulsory school (Lgr11) highlights the importance of promoting critical thinking among pupils. In this chapter, I will however focus on CDA alone, explaining what it is and also briefly present two of its areas of investigation: gender and prejudice. I will use the information in this chapter in deciding what questions will be relevant for the pupil interview.

3.1 What is CDA?

CDA stands for Critical Discourse Analysis and, just as the name states, it is the critical, multidisciplinary, approach to Discourse Analysis. Discourse Analysis (DA) is the approach to the analysis of language which focuses on patterns in a language in terms of situational and cultural contexts and how this is reproduced in spoken and written texts. It looks at the knowledge of language beyond grammar, examining the relations between the use of language and social identities and thus the way we perceive information differently, through different uses of language, which also results in different views of the world (Paltridge, 2006:2).

What CDA and DA have in common is mainly that they both focus on a ‘naturally occurring’ language use beyond grammar and isolated words and sentences. The main difference between the two approaches, according to Wodak and Meyer, is that CDA is “not interested in investigating a linguistic unit per se but in studying social phenomena which are necessary complex and thus require a multidisciplinary and multi-methodical approach” (2009:2). In other words, a CDA analyst is more interested in analyzing the discourse down to the core, trying to reveal the underlying values and positions as it is always colored by some kind of opinion in forms of social and cultural issues, e.g. gender, politics and ethnicity. Thus, there is also an interest in how power is exercised through language. (Paltridge,
A common misunderstanding, however, is that CDA only investigates serious political and social objects, as the term ‘critical’ has a negative sound to it, but it is rather ‘critical’ in the sense of challenging objects under investigation and not taking anything for granted (Wodak & Meyer, 2009:2). In a way, you could say that one of the main tasks within CDA is to disrupt common sense and unravel information that might be taken as obvious or natural.

Critical Discourse Analysis is based on situational and cultural contexts where it is extremely important to take into consideration, e.g. the social identities, the power relationships between participants, the environment and the temporal aspects, in order to make valid generalizations. According to Bloor & Bloor a CDA analyst should thus try to identify:

- the setting (or place/s) of the event;
- time or times and aspects of the event;
- mode and medium of the event (face to face, one speaker to many listeners; written to be read; television; illustrated text, for example);
- participants and their roles in the event;
- topic/s, themes (including distance of participants from the topics);
- purpose of the discourse event and purposes of the participants;
- attitude of the participants;
- the dynamics of the situation (How do events, participants, topics, attitudes, and so on, change during the course of the discourse event?)
- the genre (where applicable)

(Bloor & Bloor, 2007:29)

One of the founders of Critical Discourse Analysis is Norman Fairclough, Professor emeritus of linguistics at Lancaster University. Together with his colleague, Ruth Wadok, he has established a group of main tenets of CDA. One of the objectives is to address social problems; i.e. analyze the construction or reflection of social problems in discourse practices. Another objective has to do with history and ideology; some ideologies can remain in a language over a long period of time, and it is thus important to question language features that are linked to an ideology which may not be representative in a given context. It is also important to be aware of how power relations are created by the means of language and how these can lead to a misuse of e.g. power, prejudice and injustice. Furthermore, we find that society and culture are constituted by discourse in the sense that meaning is created in context and that it is up to a CDA analyst to investigate the purpose and authorial
stance of the speaker/writer in the construction of discourse, thus making the analysis interpretative and explanatory (Bloor & Bloor, 2007:12f, van Dijk, 2003:353).

As we can see, CDA is multifaceted and due to spatial and temporal limitations of this study, I will only cover selected aspects of Critical Discourse Analysis. I have thus decided to concentrate the study on the gender and prejudice aspects of CDA as these aspects are highlighted both in the Swedish curriculum (Lgr11) and also in the syllabus for the English language and can be directly applied to the chosen lyrics.

3.2 CDA and Gender

When it comes to power relations in our society, I believe we are all aware of the fact that some groups are more powerful and dominant than others. There is, however, not only one type of power but numerous power relations all around us, for instance there is power based on force (e.g. violence), financial power (e.g. millionaires), persuasive power (e.g. parents), power based on knowledge (e.g. professors). The term “hegemony”\(^1\) is usually used to refer to these types of dominant groups which may be integrated in habits, norms, rules, laws, etc. Characteristic examples of such hegemony are, for instance, sexism and racism where the exercised power can be enacted in numerous ‘taken-for-granted’ actions of everyday life (van Dijk, 2003:355).

Gender discrimination is one of the major research fields within CDA, and is usually studied in terms of how it is supported or created by the means of discourse. Bloor & Bloor divide it into four types:

1) the way language itself is gendered – or has become gendered – and looking at the reasons for this as, for example, the way in which a male pronoun such as ‘he’ can be used to refer to either males or males and females (but not females alone);
2) the way women and men, boys and girls are stereotypically represented in discourse;
3) the way men and women interact in discourse and whether or not there are differences in their styles of talk;
4) the way language is used by males and females in specific discourse events, such as seminars or ‘doctor-patient’ interviews.

(Bloor & Bloor, 2007:94)

\(^{1}\) “The dominance or leadership of one social group or nation over others.” (www.thefreedictionary.com)
Whereas national and racial identities are arguably socially and discoursally constructed and often forced on us, it is however possible to refuse them. Sexuality, on the other hand, is a biological construct, registered at birth, which will always link us to either a masculine or a feminine status. The nature of the gendered identity is nevertheless partly established by institutions, thus making gender stereotyping a non-biological but a social matter. An example of this is the social pressure on children to behave and be presented accordingly to their biological gender, hence conforming masculine and feminine traditional roles as a result of gendered discourse (Bloor & Bloor, 2007:95).

Since there is considerable gender discrimination when it comes to e.g. educational and work opportunities, income and child care, there is a continuous struggle for gender equality. Deborah Tannen, Professor of linguistics at Georgetown University, has done much research in the fields of discourse and gender. In Talking from 9 to 5 (1995), a popular linguistics publication, she discusses the linguistic theoretical term “marked” which refers to the adding of something linguistic, that has no meaning on its own, to a word and how this alters its base meaning. In the English language, the unmarked forms usually convey ‘male’ (e.g. actor vs actress), hence adding to the feeling that being male is the unmarked case. Tannen also sees women as ‘marked’ in their professional roles and that they usually are expected to be and behave in a certain way. Often women are assumed, both by men and women, to have a supportive role (e.g. nurse or assistant) as profession. Even though roles are changing, most people still imagine a man when hearing words like ‘doctor’ or ‘president’ (Tannen, 1995:108ff). Tannen continues: “So long as women are a minority of professional ranks, we cannot be surprised if people assume the world is as it is.” (Tannen, 1995:117)

People may not always be aware of the impact gender can have on their speaking styles, as the relationship between gender and discourse is indirect. Since there are certain perceptions of how men and women generally are and also how some professions are typically masculine or feminine, people tend to alter their behavior and language to follow the ‘normative’ patterns. For instance, a female police officer can often come across as rather masculine in her appearance (e.g. emotionally distant, serious) which, according to an ethnographic study of police officers, has to do with people believing that they have to
follow these normative patterns in order to do a good job (Schiffrin, Tannen, Hamilton, 2001:557).

However, if this is the common perception and we act according to normative gender roles we ourselves have created and continue creating, when do gender stereotypes become a sexist matter? Tannen believes that sexism is when our expectations of how things, according to old patterns, should be are not met. For instance, if you are in a hospital waiting for a doctor and you, before meeting this person, assume that he is a man which he later also turns out to be – there is nothing to be said of that. If the person, on the other hand, turns out to be female, your false assumption about old patterns of gender that no longer apply was sexist (Tannen, 1995:118).

There is much to say about gender, gender discrimination and sexism, but with this chapter I wanted to give a brief introduction to a part of CDA I find to be very interesting, current, but also very problematic and which may help connect relevant aspects of the lyrics - which are the objects of study in this essay - to steering documents. CDA can be applied to everyday discourse, representing e.g. interactions between men and women.

3.3 CDA and Prejudice

As the previous section, I here intend to briefly introduce CDA in a prejudice perspective but now with a focus on racism.

There are numerous types of power relations in our society (see Section 3.2.) and some of them are connected to prejudice. Bloor & Bloor discuss the phenomena of being afraid of the unknown, of difference and of change and the fact that everyone indeed has prejudices, i.e. they are widespread, but some are considered to be more harmful than others. Racial prejudice is of the kind that is generally less acceptable. Furthermore, they mention that even though people do not see themselves as being racist, this does not mean that their attitudes and opinions sometimes are not racist-like. However, they emphasize the fact that racial prejudice has nothing to do with hating individuals but with a general hate for people of a certain race because of their race (Bloor & Bloor, 2007:128).
The dichotomy of the **Self** and the **Other**, where the Self is normal/natural and the Other is aberrant, is fundamental to prejudice. The ‘Other’ is not necessarily linked to race, but can also involve social class, gender, religion, dialect, sexual preference, etc. This said, we can find numerous social groups in our society where prejudice often exists and is continuously expressed in various ways. As a result of this, stereotypes are created. These have qualities that are not always real, but often exaggerated or even imaginary - nevertheless there is an underlying assumption that all people from a certain category live up to these expectations or qualities and thus also to the stereotype created (Bloor & Bloor, 2007:128).

Just as there is gender discrimination (see Section 3.2.), there is also racial discrimination when it comes to areas such as education, wages and employment. Bloor & Bloor call this ‘material discrimination’ and underline that this is not the same thing as prejudice (Bloor & Bloor, 20007:128). CDA focuses on ethnic and racial inequality in terms of how they are enacted and reproduced in discourse. As we have established before, discourse is everywhere: in everyday interaction, in mass media, in literature, in films, etc. Wherever we find discourse, we also find underlying opinions or attitudes. Van Dijk expresses the main tasks of CDA in this matter:

> The major point of our work is that racism (including anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and related forms of resentment against “racially” or ethnically called Others) is a complex system of social and political inequality that is also reproduced by discourse in general, and by elite discourses in particular. (...) [It shows] what kind of discursive structures, strategies, and moves are deployed in exercising the power of the dominant (white, western, male) group, and how readers are manipulated to form or conform the social representations that are consistent with a conservative, supremacist ideology.

(van Dijk, 2003:362)

In Schiffrin, Tannen & Hamilton (2001) we also find the proposal that racism is a result of discourse, as it is through discourse racist opinions and attitudes are produced and reproduced. However, it is on the other hand through discourse we come up with antiracist strategies by criticizing and argue against discriminating attitudes (p. 371).

Along with the creation of stereotypes based on prejudice, comes labeling. Labels for stereotypes can be very degrading and racist although there is a constant change in how emotionally charged some words are. For instance, the term *black* has gone from being a stigmatized word to a fairly positive word after colored American political activists in the
1960s used this term to describe themselves and had catchy slogans with the term in focus (Bloor & Bloor, 2007:131). Labeling groups of people is an extremely sensitive matter, where you are often at the risk of offending someone. Thus, it is very important to stay updated on what is, or is not, acceptable to say - and possibly what is acceptable for some people to say, but simply prejudice or even racist for others. Bloor and Bloor explain how complex this may be: “It may seem an anomaly to have words which are not supposed to be used, but, in fact, it is generally understood that the degree of offence varies according to the context of situation – the speaker, the place where the word is uttered, the person spoken to and anyone who might overhear.” (Bloor & Bloor, 2007:131). In other words, knowing the context is fundamental when doing a critical discourse analysis of a text, as it is only then we can understand whether the lexis might be prejudice and possibly even racist.

Having a more profound understanding of an analytical tool that touches upon relevant issues, such as gender and prejudice, makes a good foundation for the production of the questions for the interview, as the aim of this study is to display pupils’ perceptions in terms of possible underlying messages and language. In the next chapter I will present the results from the conducted interview.
4. Pupil analysis of music lyrics

In this chapter, I will present the results from the interview carried out at a suburban upper secondary school. I interviewed four 16/17-year-olds, two girls and two boys, for the purpose of receiving a greater understanding of the way pupils perceive music outside of school. In order to decide what questions I were to ask the pupils, I felt I had to study possible methods of analysis and, taking into account that gender and prejudice are subjects which often occur in music lyrics and which also often are brought up in Lgr11 and the syllabus for the English language, I figured Critical Discourse Analysis would be suitable for this cause. This is the reason why I decided to include a theoretical chapter about CDA before the making of the interview questioning sheet, and the actual interview itself.

The interview was conducted in Swedish, as I felt that it had no real focus on language proficiency as such, but was rather an opinion poll and a study of how pupils perceive music in terms of underlying messages, values and language learning. I wanted the pupils to provide me with as genuine answers as possible, and therefore I wanted to minimize obstacles such as communication difficulties by conducting the interview in their mother tongue. I have, however, made an English translation of the questioning sheet which you will find attached in the appendix, and I have also transcribed the audio recordings from the interview and translated relevant material, which are used for quotes, into English.

4.1. Interview results

In this chapter I will present the results of the interview (a combination of the pupils’ interview answers and their written notes) which I will later use as a foundation for further discussion in chapter 5. First, in sections 4.1.1 – 4.1.3, the results of the initial seven questions of the interview form – applied to all three songs – are presented. These questions are focused on ideology and linguistics. Secondly, in section 4.1.4, the answers to the final questions of the interview form, concerning music in language education in general, are presented.

The informants will in this study have the fictional names: Anna, Elin, Mohammed and Andreas.
4.1.1. Flo Rida – Whistle

Firstly, all pupils were asked to talk about the thoughts and feelings they had while listening to the song. All pupils liked the song and said that it was “their kind of music”. They all agreed that the melody is very “catchy” and that they all become very happy whenever they hear the song on the radio, as it reminds them of memories from last summer when the song was number one on many music charts. Mohammed said that it is a good song, but since it has been played on the radio so often, he is now getting tired of it. The vast exposure of the song in the media does not bother Elin;

- I don’t know... I don’t really get tired of this song. Maybe it’s because I like Flo Rida.. I don’t know.

When discussing what the song was about they all giggled, making it obvious that they all had understood the real meaning of the song, nevertheless claiming that it is about a whistle. When I asked them to provide me with as genuine answers as possible, they answered the question with a more serious approach:

Elin: Well, I might as well say it then – it’s about sex. It’s a like a typical “youth track”, you know, made sexual in order to make younger people want to listen to it...

Anna: This is so his [read: Flo Rida’s] type of music.

Since they all affirmed that the song had sexual components, I imagined them to answer the next question about whether the song is appropriate for people of all ages, by saying that it might not be appropriate for children. However, they had a different point of view in the matter:

Mohammed: No, if you’re a senior citizen you shouldn’t listen to this song.. It’s like..not okay.

Anna: It would be weird if a 70-year-old man would like walk by and sing “Can you blow my whistle, baby...”... It would have been so wrong! It’s not part of his generation.

Elin: Maybe he [the imaginary 70-year-old man] doesn’t know that the song is about such things [read: sex], because I have a friend who didn’t know... what’s it called... “Jag kommer, jag kommer” [my translation: “I’m coming, I’m coming”] by Veronica Maggio... She didn’t know what it was about until I explained it to her. Imagine then that the senior citizens don’t know what it’s about... If they don’t know English that well...
Me: So it is, above all, the elderly that shouldn’t listen to the song...? What about the younger ones?

Anna: Well, the really young kids don’t understand that the song is about sex anyway, so then it doesn’t really matter. For them, it’s just a happy song... in my opinion.

They were later given a copy of the lyrics of the song, so that they could examine the language and underline words or phrases they did not completely understand. They all seemed to understand most of the text with a few exceptions: *Show me soprano ‘cause girl, you can handle; perk it; my Bugatti and pitch.* The abbreviations in the text were acknowledged to be slang – “the kind of language that artists like Flo Rida use”, said Elin.

When running the lyrics through a search engine (COCA – Corpus of Contemporary American English: http://www.wordandphrase.info/analyzeText.asp) which analyzes the frequency and degree of difficulty of vocabulary, we find that most words, 51%, are of the most common frequency range, 10% are in the second frequency range group and 39% are in the third frequency range group. No words are in the frequency range group which contains words of academic level. In other words, the lyrics of this song should not be difficult to understand for students in upper secondary school, with a few exceptions like words the pupils mentioned: *soprano, pitch, perk*, etc. Furthermore, the pupils also showed an awareness of the incorrect grammar structures in the text, such as ‘Shorty don’t even know’ and ‘Tell me she not a pro’, as well as they figured out that some words were probably above all used for the sake of making phrases rhyme.

4.1.2. Rihanna – Cockiness

This song seemed to appeal more to the girls than the boys. This might however have had something to do with the fact that neither of the boys had ever heard it before:

Mohammed: Although I’ve never heard it before, I like it. I like the melody.

Andreas: I haven’t heard it either... There are a lot of words... I think the song is ok, not great.

Elin: The song makes me happy... I get excited somehow. I would love to work out to it since it has a great beat. The lyrics aren’t that “beautiful”, but most people don’t pay attention to the lyrics anyway – at least I don’t! But just as the first song, this is my type of music.
Anna: I don’t really like the beat... I think you almost only hear the voices. The song is about sex and the lyrics contain bad words. Nevertheless, I like Rihanna and therefore I like this song... She didn’t use to have these types of songs... but nowadays she seems to go more towards that direction...

They all acknowledge the fact that the song is about sex and that, compared to “Whistle”, it is more explicit, i.e. it does not “hide the message behind the words”, as Andreas expressed it. All four of them think that this is a youthful song, in terms of lyrics and production, and that it therefore would not be appropriate for elderly people to listen to it. However, for this song they draw the line at a younger age compared to what the said about the Whistle-song and senior citizens. It seems that they draw the line around the age where you no longer go out clubbing:

Andreas: It’s not appropriate to listen to after the age of 40...

Elin: No, I’d rather say when you’re around 30 years old... I mean, that’s probably the age when you stop clubbing... They will probably hear the song playing in the clubs, but after that... I don’t think it’s okay for them to listen to it...

Once again the focus of inappropriateness rather seems to lie with a higher age, rather with young children. They only commented about younger ages when I specifically asked them about it. For this song the minimum age seemed to be around 10 to 15 – but “definitely not under the age of 10”.

Linguistically, they did not seem to have any difficulties in terms of comprehension and, since they only underlined one phrase: Like a drum line boogie, one could draw the conclusion that they found this text to be easier to understand compared to Whistle. According to COCA, these lyrics do not contain any words of academic level either, but they have more well-known words in terms of frequency (group 1: 57%, group 2: 5%, group 3: 38%, group 4 (academic level): 0%). When analyzing the one phrase they did not understand, we find that drum and boogie are in group 3, which might add to the understanding of why they found this phrase to be somewhat difficult. Unfortunately the COCA search engine does not analyze how common whole phrases are, thus I could only examine isolated words.
As we talked about the language in the lyrics they all seemed to be of the same opinion: that this is not the type of language they would ever learn in school:

Anna: *This type of language you don’t learn in school – you learn it in your spare time!*

Elin: *Yeah... And I think there should be certain limits of how far you can take it in terms in language education... I don’t think it should be so “straight forward”...*

Anna: *Since you learn these types of words from society, I don’t think you should learn them in school...*

Elin: *But... if you learn these words and phrases from society and later use them in school, the teachers will be like “oh no, you mustn’t use words like these!” In that way they might limit your knowledge a bit...*

Anna: *Yes, but they shouldn’t teach words like these!*

Elin: *No, not teach them... But if words like these are like... in a book we read in class, etc... they shouldn’t make a big fuss about it.*

It was interesting to hear the discussion the pupils had about how they think teachers should deal with informal language and this type of sexual language we find in the lyrics. The difference in style and register between language learnt in school and language learnt outside of school, can sometimes lead to a clash. Some teachers do not know how to deal with the issue of integrating the language learnt outside of school with the language education in school, and often this might lead to teachers simply correcting their pupils even though, as Elin said, it sometimes might limit their knowledge.

### 4.1.3. Swedish house Mafia – Miami 2 Ibiza

The melody and the beats are the primary reasons why the pupils like this song. They say that this is typically “youth music” and that it is perfect music for the club or the gym because of the strong beats which “get you pumped up”. When asked what the song is about, they seem to have understood it in similar ways:

Elin: *It’s about summer, chillin’... you know... girls, party...*

Anna: *Yeah... Miami... party... how they party in Miami...*

Andreas: *It’s all about party!*
The person who raps in the song is called Tinie Tempah. He is not part of the trio of DJs, but is only featuring in this song. The pupils thought the language was easy to understand except for the abbreviations. According to COCA, out of the three chosen songs in this study, Miami 2 Ibiza has the highest percentage of words in the group of the most frequently occurring words: 60%. It is the only song out of the three that has a word in the “academic group” – that word is *procedure*. No one of the pupils had, however, marked that specific word as being particularly difficult to comprehend.

In claiming that the song is simply about party, I think they might not have paid attention to the beginning of the lyric where Tinie Tempah raps about a female fan that he has an intimate moment with and records it all on a video camera. As approximately 50% of the lyrics have to do with this sexual encounter and judging from the fact that none of the pupils mentioned this, I believe that to them the lyrics are not of great importance. For all three songs it seems to have been the melody and the beat that determined whether the song was appealing to them or not. As Elin said earlier in the interview: “most people don’t pay attention to the lyrics anyway”, and continues:

Elin: *I don’t think you really have to understand the lyrics, I mean... Lately there have been lots of Spanish songs... like “Danza Kuduro”... No one understands what they’re saying unless you know Portuguese... but still you end up sitting there...*

Anna: *Yeah, you end up sitting there singing along to the song... pronouncing the words as you think they should be pronounced.*

Elin: *Yeah, and then you just end up liking the song regardless of the fact that you don’t really know what it’s about. It’s not like you will go online to look up the lyrics in order to find out what they are singing...*

As Elin mentioned, it is quite possible that most people will not take the time to look up specific words or phrases whenever there is something they do not understand in today’s constant flow of new information. It is also possible that people are in situations, when hearing unknown words/phrases, where they do not have the possibilities or the measures to look them up.
4.1.4. Music in language education

The overall impression I received from the interview with the pupils was that they did not think that it is necessary to incorporate the music they listen to outside of school with the language education in school. They already learn much English from “society”, movies and music and do not feel the need to go through “that kind of language” in the language classroom, but they would rather learn “proper” English in school, as this is something they are seldom in contact with in their spare time. They all believe that the input of English they receive outside of school is of great importance, especially in learning vocabulary, but that the input they receive in school is just as important.

Anna: I think you find a good balance between the two... I mean, you’re aware of the fact that you shouldn’t use slang and abbreviations like ‘btw’ and ‘lol’ in the scholastic English... like when you write an essay etc... Using slang and a more informal language outside of school is different... I find a good balance. But maybe the younger ones might not find that balance as easily...

Elin: There are some cocky teenagers think that they can use “their” English whenever they like, but you have to keep in mind that you have to show people respect... you can’t just say whatever you feel like.

Even though they claim that they probably would not learn much more than they would on their own, if their teacher were to use popular music that is on current music charts in the education, they nevertheless admit to it being important:

Anna: I think it would be good to use such music as teachers should vary their lessons. Only reading books and writing essays would be boring and you wouldn’t really enjoy attending those lessons. But if a teacher all of a sudden decides to do something different, like playing house music, it would be more fun and you would develop an interest in learning. You would come to class with a completely different attitude.

Elin: Yeah, but there is a limit... I mean... If the teacher were to use this song [Cockiness], everyone would be like “Woah, she’s using this song” and no one would be serious. ‘Miami 2 Ibiza’ could work as the lyrics aren’t that bad.

Anna: I do think that if using music in the education, it should be current so that we can relate to it. It shouldn’t be music from like... the 70s.

My final question was about their ideas of how you could work with music and lyrics in the language classroom in order to learn as much as possible – both linguistically and content-wise. Their focus was on language as they suggested standard ways of working with lyrics,
such as “fill in the gap” and “translate the text”. I mentioned that those ways of working with a text could be problematic as some lyrics are cryptic and have double meanings, e.g. the song *Whistle*, and that a simple translation of the text would not necessarily reveal the true meaning of the content. Then they suggested that you could write a summary using your own words and if that still would not be a valid representation of the content, you could study the artist and watch the music video for a more profound comprehension.
5. Music lyrics in relation to CDA in the classroom

In this chapter I will explore how CDA could be used in the classroom based on the pupils’ answers. CDA can be linked to the goals set in the syllabus and also in Lgr11 in the emphasis on critical thinking and to authentic material, but the question is if we can use this ‘tool’ practically in the classroom and if so - what could it do?

In Section 5.1 I will present Norman Fairclough’s CDA questions for analyzing media texts, in Section 5.2 the lyrics of study are analyzed according to Fairclough’s CDA structure and finally, in Section 5.3 I will discuss possible issues with the chosen method for this study.

5.1. Norman Fairclough’s CDA questions

When it comes to language education, and particularly media texts, Norman Fairclough believes that it should be an objective for every teacher to ensure that pupils can answer the following four (possibly five) questions about any media text;

1) How is the text designed, why is it designed in this way, and how else could it have been designed?
2) How are the texts of this sort produced, and in what ways are they likely to be interpreted and used?
3) What does the text indicate about the media order of discourse?
4) What wider sociocultural processes is this text part of, what are its wider social conditions, and what are its likely effects?
5) What can be done about this text?

(Durant & Lambrou, 2010:214ff)

I believe it is very important for pupils to pose questions like these in order to question underlying messages and not perceive everything as true. General questions like “What do you think about this text?” are not specific enough in order to reveal what is actually being said – beyond the words.
5.2. Application of CDA to the lyrics of study

In this chapter I will try to analyse the three lyrics in this study from a CDA point of view. I will see if, by using the five questions suggested by Fairclough, I can reveal the “true” implications of the songs in terms of possible underlying messages, and I will also investigate possible reasons for certain linguistic choices made in the making of the lyrics. As all three songs are fairly similar, I will cover the analysis of them in one single chapter.

5.2.1. CDA of Whistle, Cockiness and Miami 2 Ibiza: Ideology

The first questions posed by Fairclough are “How is the text designed, why is it designed in this way, and how else could it have been designed?” and they bear no simple answer. Judging from the results of my interview, I believe it is fair to say that the melody and the beat of a song are of great importance in terms of finding the song pleasurable to listen to. This is where a good producer can contribute in the making of a hit song. A catchy melody with strong beats, suitable for clubs, can make all the difference. The concept, hook and lyrics, fall into the song-writer’s hands and it is up to this person to find a subject which is current and appealing to a large audience. Sex is such a subject – at least when it comes to teen music. In investigating media influence on adolescent sexuality, Brown, Steele and Walsh-Childers (2002) state the fact that themes related to sexuality have been popular among teens for many decades. However, they claim that since the 1950s’ the physical aspect of sexuality grew much stronger than the emotional one (p. 254f). They also mention the importance of entertainment:

The topics tend to be sexual – dancing, flirting, boys and girls meeting and pairing up and parting again – all long-standing, well-worn themes of popular music; the lyrics are also laden with clichés. But to teens, the appeal of the songs may be precisely the fact that they are so predictable and demand so little from the listener. They are like a tasty confection, easy to consume and quickly forgotten, but pleasant to experience for the moment – to dance to, to tap your foot to, to sing along with, to fantasize with.

(Brown, Steele & Walsh-Childers, 2002:260)

When asking the question if the text could have been designed differently, the answer is yes – of course. The question is if one is willing to write about such things that appeal to the audience (in this case – teens), thus having a greater shot at stardom, rather than writing
about things that are important to oneself. Sometimes these two choices might, however, coincide.

The three lyrics of study do all have sexual themes – something that the interviewed pupils also noticed:

Andreas (after having heard all three songs): I’m starting to see what kind of songs you’ve chosen for us... they all follow the same pattern! They are all youthful songs about party and sex...

For this study, however, I did not choose songs that followed a certain type of pattern, but as I mentioned in the ‘Material & Method” chapter (ch. 2), my choice of songs was based on an opinion poll in the form of a survey distributed among pupils. Coincidently, a vast majority of the pupils answering the surveys seemed to like songs containing these themes.

The literal meaning of Whistle is about Flo Rida teaching a girl how to blow his whistle, whereas the underlying “true” meaning is that he wants this girl to perform oral sex on him – the whistle being a metaphor. Cockiness is also a sexual song containing a lot of puns and wordplay – for instance the words suck (my cockiness), lick (my persuasion), eat (my poison) and swallow (your pride) are all connotations of oral sex. Miami 2 Ibiza is about the singer, Tinie Tempah, having sexual relations with a girl (possibly a fan) and partying with the Swedish house Mafia. If one is fairly proficient in English, understanding the meaning and messages of these lyrics without research should not be difficult. Pupils are however often of various levels of language proficiency and texts like these are not always completely comprehensible to everyone. In such cases, a more thorough analysis could be of help.

In Section 3.1 I included information from Bloor & Bloor (2007) and van Dijk (2003) suggesting that in order to get a more profound understanding of a text it is important to look at its context, thus analyzing aspects in the text like power relations, ideologies, attitudes, purpose and mode and medium of the event. In analyzing aspects like these, we touch upon the “social processes”-question posed by Fairclough. One purpose of producing a song is to sell records and according to Brown, Steele and Walsh-Childers (2002) sex sells. The question is whether the influence artists like Flo Rida, Rihanna and the Swedish House Mafia have on people, and perhaps teens in particular, can be harmful in terms of how sex and perhaps gender issues in general are perceived.
Barrie Gunter (2002) who has done research on media sex and influence on young people discusses the high risk sexual behavior which is often portrayed in the media, in the sense of unprotected promiscuity which can lead to sexual transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies (p. 90). In the three songs of study, sex is solely viewed as something fun and easy, without including matters like risks and responsibilities such as contraception. Furthermore, Gunter states that the media has come to be one of the most important, if not the most important, sex educators in terms of the wide-spread exposure among young people. He talks about possible dissatisfaction in sex debuts among younger people, due to the expectations about sexual activity created in the media (p.94). The idea of sexual activity and intimacy portrayed in the media has often been criticized:

In the concept of rising teenage pregnancies and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, the media have been identified as often presenting the wrong kinds of examples to young media consumers. Depictions of sex rarely emphasize the risks and responsibilities that accompany sexual relations. Sex is depicted as fun and largely as risk-free. Safe sex practices are rarely allowed to surface, nor are the potential risks associated with casual sexual relations among partners who have not known each other very long.

(Gunter, 2002:109)

In Whistle and Cockiness we get the sense of oral sex being a natural component in sexual relations. Flo Rida teaches a girl, or perhaps girls in general, step by step how to perform oral sex well as his whistle is “always ready to blow” and Rihanna expresses how much she likes oral sex and consequently demands it from her “sex slave”. Songs like these add to the expectations of having oral sex, which undoubtedly leads to some young people feeling the obligation to do something they might not be completely comfortable with doing. It is, however, important to mention that people interpret songs differently. Brown, Steele and Walsh-Childers (2002) mention that the interpretations of a song lyric can vary much depending on factors such as gender, ethnicity, experiences but most importantly age. Just as Anna mentioned in the interview (see Section 4.1.1.) about young people not understanding the sexual components in Whistle, Brown, Steele and Walsh-Childrens (2002) also mean that young people (in particular preadolescent and early adolescent children) often tend to interpret songs literally thus not understanding e.g. sexual wordplay and metaphors (p. 257f).
In Critical Discourse Analysis power relations are important and in this study of song lyrics it is particularly interesting to analyze the relations between man and woman as people generally seem to believe that many song lyrics are somewhat degrading to women. In Section 3.2 I presented Tannen’s ideas about gender which had much to do with stereotyping and how men and women are represented in discourse. Gunter (2002) also discusses this matter and comes to the same conclusion: that the sexuality of women has often been emphasized in the media which has led to a sexual objectification which many feminist critics have found to be degrading to the female sex. Gunter stresses, however, that even though women’s sexuality is often subordinate to that of men’s this is not always the case, as there are for instance many pornographic videos where women are just as pleasure seeking and dominant as men, if not more (p.127). But what are the effects of the media portraying degrading ideas of women? Does it affect women’s self-regard? Gunter expressed the opinions of some feminist writers, such as Brownmiller (1975) and Gross (1978) who believe that the sexuality of women, often portrayed in e.g. pornography, has an effect:

...women become victims. Passivity is the primary contended response in sexual relations. Men may indeed learn to believe that women will respond positively to force in sexual relations, even if they initially refuse sexual advances. Meanwhile, women may learn to expect a certain degree of physical force in sexual relationships as normal. Media scenarios in which men and women respond in stereotyped ways in sexual situations may condition such sexual schema among both genders.

(Gunter, 2002:126)

I am not talking about pornography as such in this study, but some music lyrics are so sexually explicit that they could be regarded as being pornographic. The three songs of study all have sexual lyrics, but in my opinion the wordplay and puns make them less graphic and thus less pornographic. It is nevertheless interesting to see how men and women are represented in these songs. In Whistle Flo Rida, i.e. the man, clearly has a dominant role in the situation as he is teaching a sexually inexperienced girl how to give oral sex. The use of the noun ‘girl’, is also somewhat condescending in terms of power relations. In Cockiness the tables have turned as here the woman is evidently the dominant one. She even explicitly expressed that she is a dominatrix and he, the boy, is her sex slave. She orders him, although camouflaged in wordplay, to give her oral sex. She also uses the equivalent noun to girl – i.e. boy, which adds to her power. In the interviews, I remembered a few of the pupils said that Cockiness contained a lot of words, she was talking too much, too much talk compared to
beats, etc. Interestingly enough, *Whistle* actually contains almost the exact number of words as *Cockiness* does (498 vs 487 words). One could speculate whether this has something to do with the stereotypical roles of the man having a more prominent role in conversation, whereas the woman is not expected to demand much space – which Rihanna on the contrary does in this song. The power relationship between man and woman is not as obvious in the first half of *Miami 2 Ibiza* compared to the other two songs, since both Tinie Tempah, the man, and the woman are portrayed as being materialistic and pleasure seeking. The man might, however, be slightly more dominant as it is he who records the sexual activity “on his JVC”. The second half is completely different in terms of power relations, as the man (or men) is being portrayed as rich and successful (e.g. being on the guest list, affording lots of alcohol) whereas the women are being looked at as secondary sexual beings (e.g. posing for men’s magazines, dressing up as playboy bunnies, going to bed with a man despite being lesbian).

### 5.2.2. CDA of Whistle, Cockiness and Miami 2 Ibiza: Language

Continuing with Fairclough’s questions about texts in terms of Critical Discourse Analysis, and how they are produced and interpreted, we step into a linguistic analysis of the lyrics. As the pupils mentioned in the interview, these lyrics contain “youthful” language with slang and abbreviations, which may not be easy for everyone to understand. At times I had to consult the web for possible translations of certain phrases. I came across a website called ‘Rapgenius’ (http://rapgenius.com), where anyone can suggest their own interpretations of rap lyrics. These translations are obviously subjective, but since there are numerous suggestions, you usually end up getting the general idea and meaning of a phrase.

The question is why these artists have chosen to use a language which everyone may not understand. This “youthful” language which the pupils talk about might just be made youthful in order to exclude certain groups of people, such as elderly people. Durant and Lambrou (2010) bring up this matter in discussing language and media:
Mass distribution of music files, CDs, MTV videos and radio airplay give sudden, mass exposure to the particular words and idioms used in some songs. One day’s dialect term on a local housing estate (or a novel euphemism for sex, drugs or some other aspect of lifestyle – think of examples here) can be catapulted next day into international, even global circulation. Yet the lyrics of some songs seem to be private. They circulate as a kind of anti-language, having been devised precisely so as to exclude anyone outside a given sub-culture.

(Durant & Lambrou, 2010:137)

It is thus possible that some artists choose to produce lyrics with a certain type of language in order to make the song more appealing to the target audience by excluding others groups. The pupils did not seem to find the lyrics difficult to understand, but one of them expressed that it was easy to understand isolated words but that the meaning of the whole sentence, or perhaps paragraph, was not always completely comprehensible. They also mentioned that all three lyrics at times were grammatically incorrect and contained a lot of slang words, but they simultaneously acknowledged that these are “typical characteristics of youthful language”.

In *Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition* (1997) Batia Laufer discusses second language learners’ reading- and vocabulary comprehension and establishes that reading comprehension does not depend on vocabulary comprehension alone but relevant background knowledge, and different strategies might be just as important as vocabulary (Coady and Huckin, 1997:20). Thus, knowing some facts about the Flo Rida, Rihanna and the Swedish house Mafia may contribute to the understanding of their lyrics. In the interview the pupils made me aware that they “know” these artists as they are fans of their music, and therefore I occasionally heard statements like “This is so his type of music” and “I think this song is more like Rihanna”. Hence, by knowing some relevant background information before reading a text, you may already have laid the foundation for a successful guessing of possible unfamiliar words. Laufer brings up different strategies that second language learners often use when they come across unfamiliar vocabulary such as *words you do not know*, *words you think you know* and *words you cannot guess*. Words you do not know tend to be directly linked to various levels of comprehension - thus the larger vocabulary you have, the higher comprehension level you reach. Words you think you know are particularly interesting as these words are deceptively transparent which consequently leads to the reader not recognizing the words as unfamiliar:
Words that look familiar will be interpreted to mean what the learner thinks they mean. These are words with a deceptive morphological structure, idioms, false friends, words with multiple meanings, and synforms. Since learners are unaware of their ignorance of the DT [read ‘deceptive transparency’] words, they will stick to the false meanings and may use them as clues to guessing other words. When this happens, both the immediate context of the DT word and the larger context are distorted. Readers with lower awareness of DT words also score lower on reading comprehension tests.

(Coady and Huckin, 1997:31)

Despite knowing different strategies of guessing, learners might nevertheless produce incorrect guesses as words you cannot guess are affected by factors that are beyond the reader’s control, such as availability and familiarity of clues, presence of misleading clues and compatibility between the reader’s background knowledge, with possible biased opinions, and the text content. (Coady and Huckin, 1997:20ff)

I believe these are all factors teachers should keep in mind when working with authentic material and reading comprehension. As Laufer claims, I also believe that pupils’ background knowledge sometimes can be to their advantage but also to their disadvantage. In Miami 2 Ibiza the interviewed pupils had all understood that the song was about partying, when half of the text was about a sexual encounter. It is possible that their background knowledge about the Swedish house Mafia might have influenced their listening comprehension since most of the DJ trio’s songs are about parties. It is also possible that in this interview they did not listen closely to the lyrics as they had heard the song several times before and might already have felt confident with its content.

As Brown, Steele and Walsh-Childers (2002) claim, sex – and especially the physical aspect of it – is appealing to young people, and hence it is possible to understand the high number of sexual words and various connotations in the lyrics. Other words that stand out in these lyrics are words associated with “bad language”, such as damn (in Whistle), bitch, fucking, niggas (in Miami 2 Ibiza). Words like these are common in today’s music and particularly in rap music which characteristically tends to have more “rough” lyrics, but does the fact that this “bad language” frequently occurs in popular music make bad words acceptable to use? Durant and Lambrou (2010) discuss media language and acceptability and bring up issues like taboo words, swearing, slang, etc. – all elements of study in sociolinguistics. They talk about the stylistic distinctiveness of swearing which is, according to sociolinguistic professors
Lars-Gunnar Andersson and Peter Trudgill (1992), a combination of slang with taboo. They categorize different types of taboo words into four groups:

1) Dirty words to do with sex and excrement, e.g. bugger, fuck and shit.
2) Words to do with the Christian religion, in historically Christian countries /and with parallels in other religions), e.g. Christ, Jesus, sake, bloody (by our Lady, i.e. Virgin Mary) and
3) Calling a person by the name of an animal, e.g. bitch, cow.

(Durant and Lambrou, 2010:171)

They also mention a fourth group, “words that involve racial abuse”, and the reason for not adding that group to the other ones in the list, is that this group is not as frequently included in classifications. However, they stress its importance in sociolinguistic research (p.171). The songs in this study contain words from all three categories mentioned above, but I have chosen to have a closer look at the words bitch and nigga as they can be degrading to women and people of color.

The word bitch is commonly used in everyday conversations among younger people, as it frequently occurs in movies, TV shows, music – i.e. in the media. According to the ‘Free Online Dictionary’ it has four meanings: “ 1) A female canine animal, especially a dog. 2) Offensive: a) A woman considered to be spiteful or overbearing. b) A lewd woman. c) A man considered to be weak or contemptible. 3) Slang: A complaint. 4) Slang: Something very unpleasant or difficult” (www.thefreedictionary.com). My personal opinion is that a majority of Swedish pupils do not think of a female dog when they hear the word bitch, as I think they firstly associate it with being an offensive word most often used towards women. Some pupils might not even be aware of the original definition of the now offensive word.

The word nigga is probably one of the most offensive words in the English language, as it is extremely degrading to people of color and has throughout history been used in power discourses between white and black people. The Free Online Dictionary defines the word as “(ethnic slur) extremely offensive name for a Black person; "only a Black can call another Black a nigga””(www.thefreedictionary.com). It is interesting that the dictionary brings up the acceptability in terms of who is accepted to use the word as this is rather complex matter. This is also discussed by Durant and Lambrou (2010) who say that people tend to
want to “reclaim” sexually and racially offensive words like ‘nigga’ or ‘bitch’ as an act of empowerment. The fact that the same word can be considered to be both empowering and degrading makes this situation even more complex as it is hard to define who has the speaker’s right to freely use these words (p. 177). This is where context plays an important role in discourse. As I mentioned in Section 3.3, it is only when we are aware of the context in which a discourse occurs, that we can truly know if a word is offensive. Bloor & Bloor (2007:131) underline that words have various degrees of offense and that it is not as simple as defining whether a word is offensive or not, but rather defining to what degree it is offensive depending on its context.

It is Tinie Tempah who expresses both degrading words in *Miami 2 Ibiza* but it is not clear who exactly he are calling *bitch* and *niggas* as he seems to address the audience as both a singular person when saying *bitch* and a group of people when saying *niggas*. We can only speculate in why the song writers chose to use these specific words, but instead of only embracing the words as being true we should rather put them up for discussion, thus bringing us to Fairclough’s last question: what can be done about this text? In this section of the text analysis one could try to make some changes in the texts to see if the message, the ideology, the meaning, the overall impression, etc., changes. Such changes could for instance be correction of grammar, removal of slang and “bad language”, change in vocabulary and making it more formal. It is also interesting to see what happens to the feelings the texts evoke if posing questions like “what if the song was sung by the opposite gender/another ethnicity/an older or a younger person, etc.?”.

### 5.3. Methodological considerations

This study was based on the opinions of four pupils alone, as there were certain restrictions concerning time and length of the essay. Consequently, the results are somewhat subjective and therefore not representative for *all* pupils. Nevertheless, I believe that these results are valid for the aim of the study, i.e. investigating how students perceive authentic material – ideologically and linguistically – in their spare time, and that they are important as it should be every teacher’s intention to see *all* students. Thus, *every* student’s opinion matters. It
would, however, have been interesting to conduct a more intensive study to make sure results can be generalized.

Linguistically, I could have made a more profound study of the pupils’ self-report by, for instance, testing their vocabulary knowledge by making them translate the lyrics. This way I could have seen if their self-report of the English subject coincided with their actual language proficiency. However, due to various restrictions of this essay, I believe this study was carried out well and that it contains results that are to be considered important in language education as we find clear connections in both Lgr11 and the syllabus for the English language. It also opens up for further research in the field.
6. Conclusion

To conclude this study, I will in this chapter go through the purpose once more, give a brief summary of the results of the interview and finally give some final comment in terms how this study, in my opinion, can be used as motivation for teachers when working with authentic material in language education.

The purpose of this study was to see how pupils perceive music lyrics – ideologically and linguistically – outside of school and the method I used was an interview, based on the theoretical pre-knowledge about the analytical tool CDA, with four students. It was necessary to have some knowledge about possible tools that can be used in the unraveling of words and discourse structure. As this analytical tool, in particular, involved such matters as gender and prejudice, it suited my purpose well, as my theory is that music lyrics, and media language in general, contains discourses about these matters. Another theory was that pupils might listen to music lyrics containing certain ideologies, poor grammar structures and a completely different set of vocabulary, compared to material that is specifically constructed for language learning.

The results of the interview show that (keeping in mind that it is not possible to make general statements based on four pupils’ opinions alone) pupils may listen to, and appreciate, music solely because of its melody and beats thus not paying much attention to its lyrics and message. Research in advertising has shown that if you hear something (about a brand, for instance) often enough, you might eventually believe that whatever is said about that brand is true (Bloor & Bloor, 2007:141f). If pupils internalize information they receive from the media, for instance, we – as teachers – must provide them with tools so that they can question what is said and not perceive everything as true and valid, especially with regard to ideologies that may clash with the values set in the Swedish Curriculum, Lgr11, such as the equal value of all people and zero tolerance for discrimination and degrading treatment of any kind (p. 9). An appropriate tool for the cause of revealing such ideologies could be CDA:
CDA encourages educators to push beyond the surface layers of language and note the ideological work accomplished through language. In this way, researchers and teachers can further understand the ways in which certain cultural models of teaching and learning are reproduced and reinforced and other cultural models ignored. Also the use of the tools and social theories behind CDA by users such as teachers and students would serve a larger and much needed purpose of opening of CDA as a meta language to unpack and name the ways that language enact ideologies.

(Rogers, 2011:199)

By using this analytical tool and the questions suggested by Fairclough, I discovered much about the three songs of study, such as power relations between sexes, the use of possible degrading words and linguistic composition. I would not have reached the same amount of information by simply asking myself “What do I think about the text” – a basic question I believe many teachers use when discussing texts in class, and a question I purposely chose to use in the pupil interview in order to see what they thought was most important to mention. They all mentioned basic things like “it’s about party or sex”, and when talking about the lyrics’ appropriateness, in terms of content and message, they simply implied that it would be embarrassing for elderly people to listen to such “youthful” music – nothing about power discourse between man and woman or possible degrading words such as bitch and nigga. In other words, based on this study, I found the pupils to be somewhat unaware of ideologies and opinions interweaved in media discourse.

Linguistically, the lyrics were challenging in the sense that the language was “youthful”, i.e. containing lots of slang, connotations and abbreviations. Nevertheless, the pupils did not admit to having any problems in terms of comprehension. One could, however, ask if their alleged comprehension was based on their pre-knowledge about the artists or if they guessed the phrasal meaning solely based in the isolated words (see Laufer’s theories in Section 5.2.), which may be very useful strategies for understanding but can also lead to distortion of the real message.

One of the pupils mentioned that the clash of language you learn in school and the language you learn outside of school can sometimes lead to complications such as the teacher limiting the pre-knowledge the pupils have obtained in their spare time. In the syllabus for the English language it is stated that pupils (in year 7-9), in order to reach the goals, should work with texts and spoken language from different kinds of sources, that they should be able to assess language found on the internet and in other media and also that
they should be aware of how written and spoken language vary depending on context and purpose. In order for teachers to work towards their pupils reaching these goals, I believe they must integrate the language learnt outside of school with the one learnt in school, regardless of how “inappropriate” the language may be.

It should be important for teachers to acknowledge the possible outcomes in case we fail to provide our pupils with the right tools so that they can assess and question the English language they meet outside of school. It is the school’s responsibility, together with parents or legal guardians, to raise pupils to be independent people with the ability to assess the constant flow of new information ideologically and linguistically.
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E-books:

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Websites:

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• Word frequency: Corpus of contemporary American English (COCA).
  http://www.wordandphrase.info/analyzeText.asp (2012-11-23)

• Music charts.
Appendices

Interview form

1) What are your thoughts/feelings when you hear the song? Please take notes.
2) Do you like the song? Why/ Why not?
3) What is the song about?
4) What is the message of the song? Is it a good message? Why/ Why not?
5) Do you think the song is okay to listen to, regardless of age? Why/ Why not?
7) Can you underline the words or phrases you do not understand and are not able to translate into Swedish in the text? Are these words something that your English teacher would possibly teach or in some other way use in the English education? Why/ Why not? Good/ Bad?

8) Do you think you are improving your language proficiency, in terms of writing and speaking in English, by listening to music in the same language? What do you think that depends on?
9) Do you think it would be good if the teacher used current music (i.e. music that are listen on current charts), which you and your classmates might listen to in your spare time, in teaching? Why/ Why not? Do you think it would benefit your language skills? Why/Why not?
10) How do you think one should work with lyrics in English in language education in order to learn as much as possible from the lesson- both content and grammar wise?
Lyrics: Flo Rida—*Whistle*

Can you blow my whistle, baby?
Whistle, baby, let me know
Girl, I'm gonna show you how to do it
And we start real slow
You just put your lips together
And you come real close
Can you blow my whistle, baby?
Whistle, baby, here we go

I'm betting you like people
And I'm betting you love freak mode
And I'm betting you like girls
That give love to girls and stroke your little ego

I bet you I'm guilty, your honor
That's just how we live in my genre
Went to hell and paid the Rottweiler
There's only one Flo and one Rida

I'm a damn shame, order more champagne
Pulled a damn ham string, trying to put it on ya
Bet your lips spin back around corner
Slow it down baby, take a little longer

Can you blow my whistle, baby?
Whistle, baby, let me know
Girl, I'm gonna show you how to do it
And we start real slow

You just put your lips together
And you come real close
Can you blow my whistle, baby?
Whistle, baby, here we go

Whistle baby, whistle, baby
Whistle baby, whistle, baby
Whistle baby, whistle, baby
Whistle baby, whistle, baby

It's like everywhere I go, my whistle ready to flow
Shorty don't even know, she can get any by the low
Tell me she not a pro, it's okay, it's under control
Show me soprano 'cause girl, you can handle

Baby, we start something, you come up in bar clothes
Girl, I'm loosening, my Bugatti the same road
Show me your perfect pitch, you got it my banjo
Talented with your lips like you blew out a candle

So amusing
Now you can make a whistle with the music
Hope you ain't got no issue, you can do it
Give me the perfect pitch, you never lose it

Can you blow my whistle, baby?
Whistle, baby, let me know
Girl, I'm gonna show you how to do it
And we start real slow

You just put your lips together
And you come real close
Can you blow my whistle, baby?
Whistle, baby, here we go

Whistle baby, whistle, baby
Whistle baby, whistle, baby
Whistle baby, whistle, baby
Whistle baby, whistle, baby

Go on girl, you can perk it
Let me see your whistle while you work it
I'ma lay it back, don't stop it
'Cause I love it how you drop it, drop it, drop it on me

Now, shorty let that whistle blow
Yeah, baby make that whistle blow

Can you blow my whistle, baby?
Whistle, baby, let me know
Girl, I'm gonna show you how to do it
And we start real slow

You just put your lips together
And you come real close
Can you blow my whistle, baby?
Whistle, baby, here we go

Whistle baby, whistle baby,
Whistle baby, whistle baby,
Whistle baby, whistle baby,
Whistle baby, whistle baby,
Lyrics: Rihanna – *Cockiness (Love it)*

Suck my cockiness  
Lick my persuasion  
Eat my poison  
And swallow your pride down, down

Place my wants and needs  
Over your resistance  
And then you come around  
You come around  
You come around

I want you to be my sex slave  
Anything that I desire  
Be one with my femin-ay  
Set my whole body on fire

They mad at Rihanna game  
Taking over your empire  
She may be the queen of hearts  
But I’m gonna be the queen of your body parts

No one can do ya  
The way that I do  
Boy I wa-a-ant  
(Youuuuuuu)

I love it, I love it  
I love it when you eat it  
I love it, I love it  
I love it when you eat it  
I love it, I love it  
I love it when you eat it  
I love it when you eat it  
I love it when you eat it  
(x2)

Suck my cockiness  
Lick my persuasion  
Eat my poison  
And swallow your pride down, down

Place my wants and needs  
Over your resistance
And then you come around
You come around
You come around

I can be your dominatrix
Just submit to my every order
Enter my diamond matrix
If you want my golden flower

Make me your priority
There's nothing above my pleasure
She may be the queen of hearts
But I'm gonna be the queen of your body parts

No one can do ya
The way that I do
Boy I wa-a-ant
(Youuuuuuuu)

I love it, I love it
I love it when you eat it
I love it, I love it
I love it when you eat it
I love it, I love it
I love it when you eat it
I love it when you eat it
I love it when you eat it
(x2)

Homie don't beat it like a bullet
Beat my drum drum
Like a drum line boogie
(I love it when you)
Dive head first if you wanna
Sing to my body
Hold me tight mister lover
(I love it when you)
Do it like I do it
Like I said
Keep it up, boy
We can do this all day
Be my Harlem
And me St. Tropez
Never found nobody
That will do it this way

No one can do ya
The way that I do
Boy I wa-a-ant
(Youuuuuu)
I love it, I love it
I love it when you eat it
I love it, I love it
I love it when you eat it
I love it, I love it
I love it when you eat it
I love it, I love it
I love it when you eat it
I love it, I love it
I love it when you eat it
I love it, I love it
I love it when you eat it
I love it, I love it
I love it when you eat it
I love it, I love it
I love it when you eat it
I love it, I love it
I love it when you eat it
I love it, I love it
I love it when you eat it
I love it, I love it
I love it when you eat it
I love it when you eat it
Lyrics: Swedish House Mafia – *Miami 2 Ibiza*

She says she likes my watch, but she wants Steve’s AP
And she stays up all hours watching QVC
She said she loves my songs, she bought my mp3
And so I put her number in my Bold BB
I got a black BM, She got a white TT
She wanna see what’s hiding in my CK briefs
I tell her wear suspenders and some PVC
And then I’ll film it all up on my JVC

Uhh, scene one. Everybody get in your positions.
Pay attention, and listen.
We’re tryna get this all in one take, so lets try and
make that happen.
Take one, action!

She pose for FHM, She like my Black LV
We spinnin’ LPR, up on my APC
I’m in my PRPS and my Nike SB’s
Ravin’ with SHM, London to NYC
I got My Visa and My Visa
A diva and her dealer
Bitch I’m up on the guest list with the Swedish House
Mafia
You can find me on a table full of vodka and tequila
Surrounded by some bunnies, and it aint f***ing easter
I wake up in the morning with a mild case of amnesia
With a girl that like a girl like Lindsay Lohan, Queen
Latifah
If you niggas are balling then boy I must be Fifa
And that’s standard procedure from Miami 2 Ibiza

From Miami 2 Ibiza, Yeah, From Miami 2 Ibiza